

Putting Money in Farmers' Pockets:
Researching Agroforestry Practices in Kenya



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Traveling halfway around the world, I expected to find something unlike anything I had ever experienced before. Upon my arrival at Kenyatta International Airport after more than 24 hours of travel, I found my driver holding an ICRAF sign in the mass of bodies and followed him out into the big city, holding in my hands all my belongings for the next two months. Although my body and mind were exhausted from the long journey, I felt my heart rushing with exhilaration as I ventured into the unknown—Nairobi, Kenya.

After arriving at the hotel and getting somewhat settled in, I drifted off to sleep. The next morning my supervisor, Dr. Hannah Jaenicke, came to pick me up from the Hillcrest Hotel and I saw Nairobi in daylight for the first time. I accompanied her on a trip to the Sarit Centre in Westlands, where the upper class Kenyans do their shopping. The contrast between people outside the shopping centre and inside is quite striking. Outside the vast majority of people, who can be seen everywhere in Kenya walking or bicycling along the street in large numbers, are black. Once inside the Sarit Centre, or especially in any upscale restaurant, the population becomes predominately Indian and white. A few successful blacks are around, as well as black employees, but the social structure becomes blatantly obvious.

I worked at the International Centre for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF—pronounced *ee-craf*), a part of the Consultative Group in Agriculture Research (CGIAR). Since most people have never even heard the term *agroforestry*, let alone know what it means, propaganda explaining the purpose of ICRAF's research are abundant at their headquarters. "Described simply, agroforestry is the use of trees on farms. An ancient practice. Farmers have nurtured trees on their farms and pasture lands and around their homes for millennia. Described in scientific terms, it is a dynamic, ecologically based,

natural resources management system that, through the integration of trees on farms and in the agricultural landscape, diversifies and sustains crop and livestock production for increased social, economic and environmental benefits for all” (Q&A about ICRAF, 2000 agroforestry calendar). The unofficial mission statement of ICRAF is to “put money in farmers’ pockets.” Officially, “ICRAF aims to reduce rural poverty, increase food and nutritional security and enhance ecosystem resilience in the tropics through improved agroforestry systems” (Paths to Prosperity, ICRAF’s 1998-99 annual report). I worked in Programme 2, the tree domestication programme, which researches different aspects of introducing trees to farms. The research of ICRAF is based on both natural sciences and social sciences: the knowledge of how to grow trees more successfully does no good if farmers don’t use it.

While I worked at ICRAF, I lived in the hostels at the International Livestock Research Center (ILRI), another member of the CGIAR. When I moved from the Hillcrest Hotel halfway through my first week, I stayed with Emily Westergaard, another World Food Prize intern. We soon met the other students researching at ILRI for the summer: Alex from Scotland, Maria from Sweden, Raimon from Spain, and Leen from Belgium. Although we

I’m checking on my seedling development in the ICRAF nursery.



were all different ages and from different countries, we shared the commonality of being foreigners and explored Nairobi together.

I started my project at ICRAF right away. Usually interns are there for three months, so Hannah decided on an early seed germination project that would not take as long for results. Still, I wasn't able to really analyze all my data until the last week I was there. I spent my first two weeks doing manual labour in the nursery to prepare for my experiment. With the help of the nursery assistants, I filled 1600 open bottomed bags with substrate. First the substrate had to be mixed, however. I used a mixture of one part manure to two parts forest soil. In the morning we would sieve the soil through wire mesh to sift out twigs and rocks. Then we mixed the two different soils together and added water until it was of a packable consistency. Mastering the technique of filling open bottomed bags took me a while, but after a few hundred attempts, I was able to fill pots with the best of them. I spent the first two weeks filling pots in the morning and pretreating and sowing seeds in the afternoon. Then the seeds started germinating.



My precious specimens after seven weeks of growth!

As a recent high school graduate with neither previous experience conducting scientific research nor training in agroforestry, my experience at ICRAF was a little

overwhelming. I often felt I was in way over my head. I quickly figured out what was going on, though, and was able to adapt and learn. I first felt guilty that I was conducting an experiment when I had no idea what I was doing while so many lab technicians, who were much better qualified in my opinion, helped me. Fortunately, after a couple days I picked up on all the agroforestry jargon, and within a few weeks I better understood what I was doing and felt more ownership over my project. I felt confident and knowledgeable enough to make decisions without consulting someone for help.

In the nursery, plants undergo a hardening up period. They start in the propagator, which stays warm and humid, to encourage germination. Then they gradually progress to the greenhouse, which is not quite as warm and not quite as humid, but still favourable conditions for plant growth. From the greenhouse the plants are transferred to outside, where they begin to brave the elements. They start under a double layer of netting that blocks sixty percent of the sun, graduating to a net that blocks thirty percent of the sun, and finally to full sun. When I was in Kenya, winter was at its worst. This means chilly nights and cloudy days. Some of my trees didn't take well to the cold nights upon their introduction to the outside. For a majority of the species, a few seedlings withered up and looked sickly but most survived.

Moringa oleifera, however, was not so hardy. I didn't know what the cause was, but suddenly all the moringas were withering up and dying. One of the nursery workers commented that it was due to the cold nights. I realized that the sudden sickness had begun at the same time that the trees had gone outside. Although only three or four trees were still healthy, I decided to put them all back into the greenhouse. I thought I could at least prevent the few left from dying. I was disappointed when, after a day in the greenhouse, there was no

improvement in the trees' condition. Within a few more days, however, the Moringa had begun to sprout new shoots. Near the base of the withered, brown, emaciated shoot appeared bright, vibrant, healthy new growths! The Moringa was hardier than I had thought after all, and wouldn't go down without a fight. When I first harvested the Moringas, I had been confused by the seed pod still attached between the shoot and root. In most of the species I researched, by the first harvest, five days after germination, the seed is completely gone or just the outer coat remains. The Moringa seed, on the other hand, had only slightly decreased in size. When I witnessed the miraculous recovery and rebirth I hypothesized that the seed stays attached so that when the original shoot meets up with harsh conditions, the tree can just hibernate for a while and wait for better weather, and start again. Of course, this hasn't been scientifically proven and much more research must be done to reach a conclusion, but I think I'm on to something.

Exploring Kenya

While the weekdays at ICRAF were enjoyable, the highlight of my trip was the weekend getaways. I travelled out of Nairobi six times, each time going to a different part of Kenya. Sometimes I accompanied locals on their trips, sometimes I went for work, and



Elephants in the Masai Mara

sometimes I was just a tourist. Each place I went will remain in my mind for a specific reason.

I will remember the Aberdare Mountains for the elephants. This was my first trip out of Nairobi, after my second week when I went camping in with Hannah and her family. I didn't have any camping equipment with me so I borrowed a tent and sleeping bag. We left early on Saturday morning and drove up to Aberdare National Park, stopping for coffee along the way. Parks in Kenya are quite different from American parks. They are usually much smaller and much less crowded. During our weekend in the Aberdares we only saw two other parties. The roads are unpaved and often impassable without a four-wheel drive vehicle; sometimes questionably passable even with one. Ric offered to let me drive for a while. I decided to decline since I, one, haven't driven a manual transmission for several years, and, two, have never driven on the right side, which is the wrong side. I often look back on my refusal with regret; I have learned that I must take every opportunity presented to me whether it sounds good or not. Saturday night in the Aberdares it rained. A lot. I began to question how this country could be suffering a drought when the whole time I had been there it rained.

My next safari was for business, not pleasure. I accompanied Ard on visit to the field to interview farmers in Meru. We stayed there for a week and I got to cross the equator every day. My days there were a little boring since I just observed, but as I learned what was happening I became interested and listened to what the farmers were saying (Actually I



My first taste of sugar cane!

listened to Sammy interpret what they said.). Many farmers we saw were quite depressed from the drought. However, one farmer we visited was very wealthy; he entertained us for the afternoon. We walked through his tropical paradise feasting on tree tomatoes and passion fruit. He later served us sugar cane, which I ate for the first time ever. Later Ard told me this farmer is really too rich to be included in the ICRAF study since the purpose of the research is to help poor farmers.

Later I went to the Masai Mara game reserve to watch the semi-annual wildebeest migration. The wildebeest spend most of the year in the Serengeti in Tanzania, but during the dry season they cross over into Kenya where there is usually more food. This year, however,

Raimon tried to teach the Maasai soccer tricks.



they were crossing back into the Serengeti because the Masai Mara had no food either. We never actually saw the crossing, but we did see millions and millions of wildebeest littering the plains. We also saw lots of lions since there was so much easy prey. We camped near a Maasai village and interacted with the natives. During the noon lunch break from game driving, I would play a game of soccer with Maasai children.

My next excursion was to the costal town of Malindi. This was the most uneventful weekend, yet my favourite. When Emily and I got off the plane Saturday morning we had no plans whatsoever. The taxi fare to town was way too expensive for such a short distance, so we walked. The air was so hot and humid; I loved it. We found the beach and then walked

along it a few kilometres until we found our hotel. Then we spent the day lounging around by the pool and interacting with locals along the beach. The next day we went snorkelling along the coral reef and again relaxed for the rest of the day, getting nice tans. We left on Monday and took a matatu up to the Gedi ruins, an ancient Swahili archaeological site. Since we had a greater knowledge of Kenyan culture and infrastructure, Emily and I were able to feel more like Kenyans visiting the coast than tourists visiting the coast and we could fully appreciate the laid back coastal atmosphere.

My last safari was to Tsavo. We had actually planned to take a tour company to Amboseli, but Bruno, who works in lab 1 with Raymond, invited us to join him. We stayed in bandas in the park that were much better than the tents we stayed in during other safaris. Tsavo didn't have as much wildlife as the other parks, but we interacted with it much more. The foliage is much bushier there so we didn't see angry elephants until we were only a few meters away. Twice we had to quickly evacuate the roof of the Land Cruiser and speed away before the angry elephant could charge. Sunday morning we got up early to see Mt. Kilimanjaro before the clouds came and obstructed our view. Despite the wonderful landscape and scenic mountains in Tsavo, the best part by far was the stars. We were fortunate enough to be there during the new moon, allowing all the light from the stars to reach us without competition from the moon. They were so numerous in the sky that one was indistinguishable from another. Familiar constellations such as Orion became unrecognizable because so many smaller stars filled them up. I saw many shooting stars, too, some arcing almost half the sky.

Observations of an outsider

I had my first cross-cultural blunder within my first hour in Nairobi. As I automatically went to what I thought would be the passenger side of the car, the driver gave me a funny look. Then I noticed the steering wheel in front of the seat. My mind quickly made the connection and I humbly walked around to the other side of the car, explaining to the driver, whom I later found out was named Peter, that I'm used to the driver sitting on the left side of the car.

Food in Kenya actually tastes like what it is made out of. I noticed this the first day when I was eating some potato chips, which are called crisps. Unlike chips in the US, these crisps actually tasted like potatoes. French fries, there called chips, underwent the same change. They weren't any less salty or greasy; Kenyan food in general is incredibly greasy. They just tasted like potato in addition to salt and grease. While examining the ingredient list on my peanut butter I was shocked at its brevity: peanuts and salt. While I prefer American peanut butter to anything I ate in Kenya, there is some comfort in knowing that such simple products are entering my body. The consistency of the peanut butter, however, was not as comforting. I later found out that the ingredient list doesn't necessarily tell all the ingredients though, so most likely I was eating more than just peanuts and salt with jelly on my sandwich. Similarly, bread had no preservatives. It tasted great while it was fresh, but bread only stayed fresh for a few days. After less than a week bread was guaranteed to be either mouldy or rock-solid.

The lack of preservatives in Kenyan food is not a big problem since it is primarily processed right in Nairobi. The conditions of roads in Kenya reduce the possibility of transporting food a long distance to slim if feasible at all. Cereals and biscuits from the UK

are available for sale, but cost about ten times the amount of food manufactured in Nairobi. The higher quality, however, greatly reduces the monetary sacrifice. I was fortunate enough to find some Post Toasties that actually didn't cost much more than the Nairobi made corn flakes and tasted much better. Kenyans also have a very confused understanding of American pizza. I am not, by any means, a pizza connoisseur. I enjoy frozen pizzas just as much as fresh delivery and I am not picky (aside from not eating meat). In Kenya there are two types of pizza: Italian and American. The Italian pizzas are okay, but the American style is unpalatable. I lifted up my hopes every time I saw a sign promising Chicago pizza, and every time was thoroughly disappointed. None of the pizzas I saw were in true Chicago style of the sauce over the cheese. Fortunately, I never got desperate enough to check if Dominoes delivers overseas. I doubt it does.

True Kenyan food, not American imitations, is quite excellent. The best, but not by far, is mandazi, a delicious triangle of sweet bread deep-fried to perfection sold by street vendors. It is similar to the fry bread I used to make at Living History Farms Day Camp at the Indian site, only even better. I had previously never thought that possible. A close runner-up to mandazi is chapatti, a pancake-like tortilla. Like all Kenyan food, it is fried. After some experimentation with friends, we found that chapatti spread with Nutella makes a wonderful dessert. A drive along any Nairobi street will lead to several tempting encounters with vendors roasting maize. Coming from Iowa, I was amazed to find a way of preparing corn that was unfamiliar to me. I expected the roasted maize to taste like corn on the cob, but it actually tasted remarkably similar to pop corn. A list of Kenyan foods could go forever, but would never be complete until it listed ugali. The staple food of Kenya, ugali is described by most of the brave souls who tried it as a brick of cement. It is prepared by boiling potatoes

and corn meal and a variety of other miscellaneous foodstuffs until all the nutrients are gone and then baking it into a cake. The nutritional content is as low as the production cost, the latter weighing more heavily on the minds of its consumers than the former. No Kenyan experience is complete without a sampling of this culinary wonder.

Before I got to Kenya, the rains had failed. As if a drought were not bad enough, Kenya was unlucky enough to use hydroelectric power as its only source of electricity. As the water level in the river sank lower and lower, the amount of power able to be generated decreased as well. To compensate for the loss of power, Nairobi implemented power rationing: each section of the city would only have power for half the day. Unfortunately this did not conserve much energy and instead merely inconvenienced everyone in the city. People would use the power while they had it, which often meant getting up in the middle of the night to do laundry. Living in ILRI, I was not very affected by the power cuts because they had a generator so I would only be without power for a few seconds at a time. Similarly, ICRAF, along with most commercial centres, had generators so that business went on as usual. The downtown business district of Nairobi was also exempt from power rationing. Later water rationing began but again ILRI was not affected so my life went on oblivious to the suffering of most in Nairobi.

The Swahili language has no word for conservation and for most Kenyans the idea of saving isn't as important as it now is in the West. Having a clean car is very important in Nairobi and, despite the water rationing and severity of the situation, people still washed their cars every day. The problem was so widespread that eventually it became illegal to wash a car in Nairobi. Unfortunately this law was not enforced and every day gallons of water were used to clean cars in the middle of the drought. At ICRAF the international staff were the

only ones who seemed concerned about the drought at all. I would keep the lights off while I was working and use the sunlight that entered through the windows to conserve energy, and almost every time a Kenyan entered the room he would turn the lights on. I also found myself turning off water faucets often that had been left running. I found it very frustrating that the people most affected by the drought seemed the least concerned.



These are buildings along Wayaki Way, named after one of the revolutionists from Kenya's independence in the sixties. This picture was taken near the exit to Uthiru, which was near ILRI.

AIDS education has been increasing recently in Africa as the result of several awareness campaigns. When I rode the bus to work every day I saw signs that said, "Let's talk" all over all the buildings. I could not figure out what they meant, though I tried every time I saw one. Next to the big white block letters was a picture of two faces with "trust" written on top. Since Kenya's population is very religious and on the radio there are several advertisements for self-improvement, I thought perhaps this was a message for families to talk more. For lack of anything else this might be, I finally decided that these were just signs advising better communication. "How nice," I would think as I drove by. About a week later, as I was going to the Aberdare Mountains, I was fortunate enough to finally see one of these advertisements more closely. Underneath the picture I read, "pack of three condoms." I was shocked that what I had interpreted as a wholesome message to promote family togetherness was, in fact, an advertisement for condoms. I later found out that these were recent signs, introduced to combat high AIDS levels in Africa.

I always have enjoyed stargazing, so before I even arrived in Kenya I was excited to look at a different sky, especially at the prospect of seeing the Southern Cross. During my first weekend I enquired about the stars in Nairobi: are the lights of the city too bright to see stars well and are we far enough below the equator to really see the southern cross? I was informed that yes, the stars are very visible in Nairobi, especially with the power rationing, and yes, the Southern Cross is visible. Unfortunately, Nairobi winter nights tend to be very cloudy. For the first six weeks I was only able to catch little glimpses of the stars between clouds. Coming from Iowa, I was not used to such constant weather. I felt sure that eventually I would have a chance to see the night sky unobstructed by clouds. As the weeks passed with no change in weather, however, I began to question this and worry that I would spend eight weeks in Kenya without once seeing the African sky in all its glory. I was even more frustrated hearing from Emily that when she was in Nairobi National Park the clouds cleared for about half an hour and she was in awe of the sky. At that time I had been camping in Aberdare National Park and it rained all night. Later when I was at the Masai Mara game reserve the sky was clear at night, but I was there during the full moon. This turned out to be a blessing because we could walk around the campsite after dark without a flashlight, but I was quite annoyed at my inability to ever see the stars. Two weeks later, however, I finally saw the stars. I was in Tsavo National Park, many kilometres from a city and electricity and there was a new moon. The sky was absolutely stunning. I could barely recognize the few constellations I know because they were obscured by other stars inside that are usually not visible. I saw the Southern Cross, the big dipper right side up and much larger than I am used to, and the Milky Way. Shooting stars flew across the sky in giant arcs. I could actually watch them as they burnt down to nothing in the atmosphere. The only problem about seeing

such a glorious sky is that now every time I see the stars in Iowa I just think about what I am missing.

The roads of Kenya are in sad condition. The government doesn't bother to repair them because a few of Kenya's monstrously large unemployed make their living receiving tips for filling potholes with dirt. They don't need to worry about running out of holes to fill because every time the rains come the dirt empties and the potholes create for more adventures on the road. Rumours circulate that when no cars are along the road the workers actually empty the holes, ensuring that even in dry times they will appear busy when cars pass. Always travelling in vehicles, I was never able to verify this. Hannah never gave tips to the workers; she explained that if they weren't out there the government would employ real road workers to fix the mess.

I have been informed that Kenya does indeed have driving rules, but I could neither figure out what they are nor notice evidence of their enforcement. In City Centre some traffic lights exist; however, even the lights that aren't burnt out, which are few, are ignored. The method seems to be going if you can, and if you can't the other cars will be sure to stop for you, similar to walking in a college town. Despite the madness of Nairobi roads, and the witness of several near misses and outraged drivers, I never saw an actual accident. Almost all cars are in desperate need of repair, except the Mercedes and BMWs driven by the Indians and whites. Cars drive with burnt out blinkers and headlights, flat tires, dragging mufflers, broken windows, and any other condition that doesn't actually prevent the vehicle from moving. When only one blinker works the driver will turn it on regardless of the direction he is turning.

Public transportation leaves much to be desired. Once the confusing matatu system is figured out, however, one can travel anywhere in Kenya for a laughably low rate. Whites must be prepared for several stares, however, as the matatus, Kenya's communal minibuses, are ridden almost exclusively by blacks. The matatu is actually one of the most blatant cases of false advertising in the world. The word *matatu* is Kiswahili for three cents; strangely a typical ride across town ranges from ten to twenty shillings. The first matatus, however, cost three cents and ever since then the name has stuck while the price has not. I didn't go on many matatu rides during my stay in Nairobi, so for me riding one was an adventure. For most locals they are a pain. Raymond, a vet student from Tufts who also spent the summer in Nairobi at ILRI, relied on matatus for transport to and from work during his first month here and has the emotional scars to prove it. Of all his matatu stories, only one has a happy ending. One morning every matatu numbered 22, which is the number that stops near ILRI, was full. Finally Raymond stopped a matatu that wasn't numbered 22 but also had no passengers. "I know you aren't going to ILRI, but I'll give you 60 shillings to take me there," he said to the driver. This was equivalent to the fare for six riders and probably more than the driver would have made had he continued on his route. When Raymond arrived at ILRI he was so happy to have had a hassle free ride he paid the driver 100 shillings.

Nairobi also has its share of taxis, both official and unofficial. The official taxis cost more and are not as convenient as informal taxis, but are much safer. All taxis, however, are quite expensive, especially compared to cheap matatus. Everywhere around town taxi drivers offer their service to all the whites walking around. I avoided taxis as much as I could, simply because I am cheap and they are not. I did at one time, when I was loaded with groceries, give in and take a taxi. After that, I avoided them even more. As I left the Uchumi

with my arms full of groceries, several taxi drivers saw dollars and offered to give me a ride. This was before I had ridden a matatu and didn't yet know how the system works so I decided a taxi would be the safest way home. One driver had been leaning on a car that looked to be in pretty good condition, so, naively, I assumed that that was his taxi. After agreeing on the price, I saw which car was really his. All I have to say about that ride is that the car didn't break down and the doors closed, so it could have been worse.

There is no one language spoken by everyone in Kenya. Most Kenyans come from the Kikuyu tribe and at home speak Kikuyu accordingly. Everyone raised in Nairobi has a working knowledge of both English and Kiswahili, with a forte in whichever language their school taught. I picked up a little Kiswahili but I never benefited much since when I went out I was usually with Jennifer, a Kikuyu, and when she didn't speak English she spoke Kikuyu. The young people of Nairobi have developed a language of their own called chang, a cross between English and Kiswahili, similar to the Spanglish spoken by Chicanos of the US. I picked up some chang greetings as well. While I was in Meru, tagging along on a project, Sammy, an ICRAF worker originally from Meru, translated Kimeru for the farmers and us. It was here that I learned, for the second time, a useful Kiswahili phrase: hakuna matata. Later I was in the Masai Mara game reserve and I met many Maasai, a most curious tribe. Some tried to teach me a few Kimaasai phrases but by this time I was getting so confused with the plethora of phrases from all sorts of languages that I gave up. During my weekend in Malindi I pieced together a phrase that caused much laughter from the locals: hakuna pesa, which means "no money." After declaring this to the mob of people showing me necklaces and wooden carvings they all laughed and said, "I don't believe it." Malindi was where people were most impressed with my Kiswahili. I greeted everyone with a Jambo in reply to their

Ciao (Malindi is most frequently visited by Italians) and they occasionally continued with a Habari. I would respond with the standard mzuri, and watch many eyes widen in surprise. “You speak Swahili?” was the most common reply. I laughed and promised that I only spoke a little. I learned to say I’m from Nairobi, a useful phrase to get lower prices while bargaining. The curio owners were not fooled, however, and always laughed and asked where I was really from.

The people of Kenya are generally very friendly. My first night in the hotel one of the workers started a conversation just by asking how I was. In typical American fashion, I said, “I’m fine. How are you?” He responded that he, too, was fine, but cold, and proceeded to tell me about the weather of Kenya and that they aren’t used to such cold, rainy weather. From that point on, every time I met that guy, I think his name was Stanley but I wasn’t sure exactly what he said, I was culturally bound to stop and chat at the risk of being incredibly rude. All business was conducted in this manner, which caused me much frustration at first when I just wanted to get something done but I learned to enjoy it. A simple visit to the financial office to request more money, a task that would take a few minutes at most in the US, required a minimum of ten minutes at ICRAF to discuss the weather, my project, my upcoming travels, or anything else of interest. The pace of life in general is much more leisurely in Kenya than in the US. I found that within two weeks my walking speed was greatly reduced, and not simply because at the higher altitude a walk up to the nursery made me light headed.

When I rode the bus to work in the morning I passed a school and there were always children walking along the road, dressed up in their immaculate school uniforms. I thoroughly enjoyed their antics and watched them running, chasing, and playing games,

usually with a smaller brother in the back hurrying to keep up. Away from Nairobi, children were always shy around an *mzungu*, or white person. I was introduced to several little children who, immediately after shaking my hand, ran back to the skirts of their mother.

While walking along the streets of Malindi I saw a less cute aspect of the children. They would start with a shy little Jambo, to which I would smile and reply. Then I was shocked at first and appalled later when they shouted, "Give me ten shillings!" In Meru and on the streets of downtown Nairobi I also encountered street boys who asked for money. I would have given them food, but not money, which they use to buy glue for sniffing. A number of boys on the streets of Nairobi ask for sponsors for school. They approach whites explaining that school is expensive, which is true, and asking for money to buy supplies and a uniform. I sincerely hope that most tourists do not fall for this ploy, since this money as well does not go towards the boy's education but instead to the purchase of glue which leads to the destruction of his mind and his ultimate demise.



Jennifer showed me around downtown Nairobi at the weekly Maasai Market.

Researching in Nairobi was an amazing opportunity. I experienced life in a developing nation and witnessed the need for food security as well as what is being done to improve the quality of life for people all over the world. I discovered what everyday life is like at an international research center, helping me figure out what I want to do with my life. Beyond the academic advantages, I also gained insight into a new and different culture. Immersing myself in a lifestyle completely different from the one I knew, I examined my own culture, mannerisms, and prejudices. I experienced living on my own in a foreign country: a complete independence unavailable to most 18 year-olds. I am already looking

forward to my next experience abroad and hoping the next opportunity will be as memorable as my first.